

The Mercury News

Saturday, March 15, 2003

Utilities panel delays vote on solar power tax

San Francisco

The California Public Utilities Commission postponed until April 3 a scheduled vote Thursday on a controversial plan to charge solar customers of Pacific Gas & Electric and other utilities. The fees would help cover the state's energy crisis bills.

The proposal arose out of concern that if customers start producing their own power, whether by polluting gas generators or clean solar systems, other ratepayers will have higher bills for the state's electricity bonds and contracts.

But solar power advocates said fees on solar will deter needed investment in clean energy and punish those who took the trouble and expense to invest in solar systems. Several California congressional representatives, including Mike Honda and Sam Farr, have opposed the proposal.

The original proposal would allow charges ranging from half a cent to 2.7 cents a kilowatt-hour on the energy generated. Two alternative proposals would partly or fully exempt solar power.